

# NJPN North West Justice & Peace E-Bulletin July 2026

The e-bulletin for the North West, linked to the National Justice and Peace Network (NJPN), is produced jointly within the dioceses of Lancaster, Liverpool, Salford, Shrewsbury and Wrexham. Please send articles and diary dates to: [anneoc980@hotmail.com](mailto:anneoc980@hotmail.com)

## NJPN 48TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE, JUST TALK

### The Hayes, Swanwick, Derbyshire 24 – 26 July

The invitation is simple: Come and have your say as well as listen to what others have to offer. This conference is not just about speaking. It is about creating space for reflection; encounter; disagreement; curiosity; humility and even courage. The courage to engage respectfully in difficult conversations, led always by Spirit of Truth.

*“Dialogue is born from an attitude of respect for the other person, from a conviction that the other has something good to say.”* Pope Francis

The conference aims to increase participants understanding of how language and other forms of communication are used or misused in our current context, and to help participants challenge disinformation and divisive rhetoric, change narratives, foster dialogue and encounter, and speak truth to power.

In celebrating 60 years of *Nostra Aetate*, Pope Leo XIV said the document *“opened our eyes to a simple yet profound principle: dialogue is not a tactic or a tool, but it’s a way of life – a journey of the heart that transforms everyone involved, the one who listens and the one who speaks.”*

- Sir John Battle (former Member of Parliament for Leeds West) will be holding an Ecumenical Conversation on Engaging with Community Groups.
- Billy Vaughan, Public Affairs Officer for the Quakers, will be speaking about the right to protest and how that relates to a different part of dialogue, freedom of speech.

In this current climate the need for us all to be able to communicate is more important than ever.

**THERE ARE A LIMITED NUMBER OF HALF PRICE PLACES FOR 18-35 YEAR OLDS AT £150 FOR THE WEEKEND!**

**ESSENTIAL:** Email Sharon, the Administrator to check if space is still available! [admin@justice-and-peace.org.uk](mailto:admin@justice-and-peace.org.uk)

## NJPN CONFERENCE WORKSHOPS

**WORKSHOPS** (with grateful thanks to all our Workshop Leaders for their interesting ideas)

### 1. The Information–Misinformation–Disinformation Triangle

**(Brian O’Toole)**

Young people are growing up in a world where information is shaped by social media, fast-moving news cycles, algorithms, and increasingly by artificial intelligence. Brian O’Toole will be leading an in-person NJPN workshop, which creates a supportive space for participants to explore how information, misinformation, and disinformation spreads online, and how these forces influence people’s understanding of truth. Participants will discuss real-world examples, question digital content, and examine the role of algorithms and AI in shaping what we see and share online — including who may be exploiting social media and for what purposes. Through open conversation and guided reflection, the session aims to strengthen critical thinking, digital awareness, and a shared sense of responsibility as we navigate today’s complex and rapidly changing information landscape.

### 2. Resilience and Dialogue in Conflict Zones

**(Azad Hasan)**

Azad Hasan is currently Project Coordinator at the Justice and Peace Refugee Project in Newcastle. He is also a PhD candidate at Durham University, School of Government and International Affairs. His research focuses on rebel governance, civilian agency, and everyday life in violent conflict. Prior to his doctoral studies, Azad worked in humanitarian roles within refugee camps and as a freelance journalist in conflict-affected regions. His scholarly and professional interests centre on how civilians navigate protracted conflicts and demonstrate resilience in their everyday lives. Drawing on his fieldwork, in this workshop Azad will share some of his experience with us with particular focus on authentic dialogue in everyday life.



### **3. Deaf Awareness: The beauty of God's Word in Sign Language**

**(Joselyn Taylor and Peter McDonagh)**

Joselyn Taylor and Peter McDonagh of the Catholic Deaf Association will give training in Deaf awareness and on communication strategies to improve access to church community especially for those for whom BSL is their first and /or preferred language. This workshop will be an interactive dialogue. It will be practical, with a presentation. There will be opportunity for questions and answers, lip reading exercises and the opportunity to learn some basic sign language.

<https://catholicdeaf.org.uk/>

### **4. Having difficult conversations**

**(Fay Pretty)**

PeaceJam UK presents an interactive workshop which will explore how can we can engage young people (and adults) in difficult conversations about the local and global issues that they witness and want to address but very often don't know how. Including topics such as diversity, tolerance, social justice, conflict, and non-violence. We will use Lego as communication tool and share our experience working in schools across the UK, providing practical tips to take away; as well as sharing PeaceJam's education programmes and teacher-friendly resources which draw on the lives of the Nobel Peace Laureates as positive role models for our children and teenagers.

<https://peacejam.org.uk/>

### **5. From access to action: poverty and participation**

**(Liam Purcell)**

Our churches are at the forefront of social action to respond to the growing scandal of poverty in the UK. But too often, churches treat people in poverty as passive recipients of charity. If we respect the dignity and agency of every person, and stand alongside people in solidarity, we can do much more to tackle the injustices that are at the root of poverty. Hear about '*Sharing Power to Shape Mission*' – a Church Action on Poverty programme which enabled dialogue and relationships between church leaders and church members who have direct experience of poverty. We'll share skills and approaches that can help church projects to ensure everyone is heard and has a chance to take part.

The workshop will be led by Liam Purcell, Chief Executive of Church Action on Poverty [www.church-poverty.org.uk](http://www.church-poverty.org.uk)  
<https://church-poverty.org.uk/2025/04/25/sharing-power-to-shape-mission/>

### **6. Language and Racism**

**(Margaret -Ann Fiskén)**

This workshop examines the role language plays in naming, normalising, and challenging racism. Together we will explore common terms, phrases, and narratives—both secular and church-based—and how they can unintentionally reinforce racial injustice. Grounded in a Christian commitment to truth and love of neighbour, the session will offer practical tools for speaking about race with greater clarity, humility, and faithfulness.

### **7. Interfaith dialogue – for justice and peace**

**(Barbara Butler)**

This workshop will present interfaith dialogue as a necessary contribution towards the creation of understanding and peace between people of the world faiths in the UK and around the world. It will enable participants to explore how to engage with people of other faiths and beliefs, to listen to other world views than their own and to share. There will be examples of good practice and a power point presentation.

### **8. Forces Watch**

**(Emma Sangster)**

With the international tensions and conflict of recent years, demands for more 'hard power', higher levels of military spending and preparation for war against Russia have gained prominence. The government's 2025 Strategic Defence Review laid plans for the defence industry to become an 'engine for growth' and for the 'whole of society' to be mobilised. This workshop will look at political and media narratives around 'defence' and the role they play in normalising military approaches to conflict and discuss how we can continue to foster cooperative approaches and a wider understanding of common security. It will be led by Emma Sangster from ForcesWatch which investigates and raises awareness about militarism in the UK, with a focus on civil society and young people.

<https://www.forceswatch.net/>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-strategic-defence-review-2025-making-britain-safer-secure-at-home-strong-abroad>

## 9. Dialogue, AI, and the Future of Advocacy

(Andrea Speranza - CAFOD)

Pope Francis has warned of the risk of becoming “rich in technology and poor in humanity” if we lose the “wisdom of the heart.” This session will explore the Church’s teaching on AI and how, in a world marked by the rapid rise of Artificial Intelligence, human dialogue can become a radical act for social change. We will also discuss how, in a time of growing political tension, as people of faith, we can bridge the gap between “we” and “them,” ensuring that our message for social justice remains not only loud and clear, but above all, genuinely human.

<https://cafod.org.uk/>

## 10. A time to talk with our head, heart and hands: An OutoftheBox story,

(Helen Bell)

The workshop will be experiential and interactive. It will share a story on sand using simple materials from the box and natural materials. The group will be invited to participate in the story and to seek wisdom from their own stories, the collective wisdom of the group, and to be open to new wisdom from that which lies beyond. The process is “light yet deep” as participants are encouraged to be playful and curious, whilst open to discovering new insights and “aha moments,” both for themselves and for their contexts.

<https://outofthebox.org/>

LINK:

<https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/conference-2026/njpn-conference-workshops/attachment/workshops/>

**STOP PRESS: THERE MAY BE SPACES AVAILABLE DUE TO CANCELLATIONS...contact the Administrator**

[admin@justice-and-peace.org.uk](mailto:admin@justice-and-peace.org.uk)

## TIME TO ACT - A JUST PEACE FOR ALL WHO CALL THE HOLY LAND HOME

**A shared commitment for justice, peace and human dignity**

Across Palestine and Israel, communities are living through devastating violence, loss and injustice. Palestinian Christians have called on the global Church to respond not with silence or despair, but with courage, compassion, and action.

Pax Christi is part of the Just Peace Coalition which brings together churches and Christian organisations across the UK to respond to that call. Together, we are inviting individuals, churches, and communities to join our Time to Act campaign and commit to working and praying for a just peace for all who call the Holy Land home.



This is not simply a moment of awareness. It is time to act. By adding your name, you are joining a growing movement of people committed to listening, learning, living differently, and taking action for justice, accountability, and peace.

Join the campaign: <https://justpeacecoalition.com/>

*“The Holy Land is sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims alike. It needs to be a place where the dignity of every person is recognised and protected. Lasting peace can only be built on a foundation of equal human and civil rights; justice and mutual respect for all Israelis, Palestinians and people of every religious belief. I warmly support the “Time to Act” campaign and the call for a future in which every person can live peacefully, free of violence and intimidation, knowing that their God-given dignity is upheld. It is vital that our Government listens to those calling on the international community to help bring about a just peace and ensure that international law is respected and upheld.”*

**Bishop James Curry** (Lead Bishop for the Holy Land, Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales)

### The Just Peace Coalition is:

Pax Christi, CAFOD, SCIAF, Christian Aid, Quakers, Sabeel Kairos, FaithJustice, Embrace the Middle East, EAPPI, Amos Trust, Christians for Palestine, All We Can, Justice and Peace Scotland, Commitment for Life, Iona Community, the Church in Wales, the Methodist church, the United Reform church, and the Union of Welsh Independent churches.

Contact: [communications@paxchristi.org.uk](mailto:communications@paxchristi.org.uk)

## THEY WOULD STILL CHOOSE GAZA...

**Heather Kiernan writes** June 19: Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip have killed 1,005 Palestinians since a ceasefire was reached between Israel and Hamas last October. Living conditions in Gaza remain dire, with nearly 80% of people facing hunger and dependent on humanitarian aid for their survival. And yet, many Palestinians choose to remain in Gaza despite the devastating hardships, severe shortages, and widespread destruction. Their decisions are rooted in a deep attachment to their homeland and a profound reluctance to leave their ancestral lands and become refugees. For many, this stance is a defiant choice to protect their rights and maintain a connection to their community, even while living among the wreckage of their previous lives. I know that this is how my Rida feels.

So what remains in Gaza when normal life is gone? When the war ends their task will be to rebuild more than concrete. They will have to repair their collective identity that has been eroded by hunger, fear and enforced sameness. They will need more than flour and fuel. They will need the places where they can once again be different together: classrooms and cafés, businesses and farms, community centres and stores. Today's poem by Huda Skaik says it all. They would still choose Gaza...

## I WOULD STILL CHOOSE GAZA

If I had the choice,  
would I wake up somewhere  
untouched by grief,  
and not a warning —

where life doesn't arrive  
wearing the face of loss,  
where goodbye is not rehearsed like prayer,  
and mothers do not tuck away each child's  
every laugh and smile and glance,  
as if preparing for their absence —

where children sleep through the night  
without learning the grammar of drones  
before they learn the names of rain?

You ask me  
if I would choose another life  
far from all this weight of agony.  
Maybe I would wake lighter.

Maybe my heart would not carry  
so much rubble.  
Maybe memory would be a garden  
instead of scattered ash.

But still —

I would choose Gaza.

I would choose her cracked streets  
that recognize my footsteps,  
the sea waves that whisper of  
our longing to every border.

I would choose the call to prayer  
weaving through broken minarets,  
the smell of bread at dawn,  
and old men lifting their shutters  
as if nothing had been destroyed.

I would choose the laughter that survives,  
the way we speak without words,  
with eyes that have learned too much.

Because Gaza is not only pain.  
She is what remains of me  
when everything else is taken,

every laugh that refused to die,  
every hand that shared its last bread  
and still said: forgive me, it is not enough.

How could I leave what built me  
and still call myself whole?

So if you ask again —

if I were given another life,  
another country, another fate—

my soul would still walk barefoot  
toward Gaza.

Again.

Again.

Again.

~Huda Skaik

**UPDATE:** On July 2nd, as the world marked 1,000 days since Israel's genocidal war on Gaza began, more than 90 percent of the Gaza Strip has been destroyed, and Israeli forces are in control of 80 percent of the besieged territory. More than 21,500 of those killed in Gaza were children, including 1,022 babies. A further 9,500 people are missing, many believed to be buried under rubble, while 173,514 have been wounded.

It is shocking to think that about 223,000 tonnes of explosives have been dropped by Israel on Gaza during the war – 16 times more than what the United States dropped on Hiroshima in 1945 with the atomic bomb.

The other day, I heard a report on Al Jazeera saying that Gaza is buried under an estimated 68 million metric tons of rubble; the equivalent to the weight of about 186 Empire State Buildings. And my Rida has been telling me that she watches huge numbers of rats come out from under the rubble knowing that there are dead bodies under it.

## LIVERPOOL INTERFAITH WALK BRINGS COMMUNITIES TOGETHER

**Adeline Salim** July 6, 2026

On a balmy summer evening, faith leaders and community organisers hosted a simple yet profound interfaith walk through L8, an inner-city Liverpool neighbourhood enriched by a vibrant mix of students alongside long-established and newly arrived migrant communities.

Now in its fourth year, the event attracted more than 230 participants, with some travelling from well beyond the Liverpool region. "In the first year, when the first 20 people arrived, we thought that was a decent number, but then more kept coming and we ended up with 120! We called Al Rahma and said we'll need more food," recalled one of the organisers, Piara Miah of Faiths4Change.

The idea for the walk emerged after the then Rector of Liverpool, Rev Canon Crispin Pailing, approached Joe Ramsden (previously of Kuumba Imaani) about organising an interfaith walk in Liverpool 8 ahead of the Coronation of King Charles III in 2022, reflecting the King's long-standing commitment to interfaith dialogue and religious diversity. Although the walk was not held that year, the initiative subsequently took shape through collaboration with Faiths4Change and other local partners. Over the past two years, the event has been supported by the Duchy of Lancaster Benevolent Fund, with this year's walk also receiving support from Councillor Rahima Farah.

The event began at St Philip Neri Roman Catholic Church, now home to the University Chaplaincy. After introducing the history of the building, including its recent appearance in *This City Is Ours*, starring Sean Bean, Fr Neil Ritchie, the chaplain, answered questions from participants. He spoke about efforts to build relationships across faith communities through both social outreach and dialogue. During university term time, students from Catholic and other Christian traditions volunteer at the soup kitchen run by the Missionaries of Charity Sisters. The chaplaincy also hosts interfaith panels where representatives from the Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Hindu communities answer students' questions, while regularly welcoming visits from student groups of other faiths. Fr Ritchie emphasised the Church's desire to become more outward-looking and to engage positively with people of different religious traditions.

Will Kelly, a Liverpool resident, commented, "The first thing that stuck me about this event, and what I will remember for months to come, is the number of people that attended. It's a rare enough thing when you get to see a church, a synagogue and a mosque packed with so many different souls all brought together by this amazing expression of solidarity amongst the faiths in Liverpool."

From there, Fr Stavros led the group to the Greek Orthodox Church of St Nicholas, dedicated to the patron saint of sailors and merchants in honour of Liverpool's maritime heritage. Born and raised in Liverpool, Fr Stavros explained several aspects of Orthodox tradition, including the customary seating arrangement in which men and women sit separately, with unmarried women traditionally seated in the upstairs gallery behind a low screen. He also described the bishop's visits, which occurs around three times a year, when the usual three-hour Mass can extend to five hours. One comment particularly captured the audience's imagination. After hearing that women do not enter the sanctuary, several Muslim women jokingly asked, "If women aren't allowed in the sanctuary, who does the cleaning?"

Afterwards, the group, led by Rabbi Warren Elf, made the short walk to the Grade I-listed Princes Road Synagogue, passing the striking mural of Nelson Mandela bearing his famous words, "Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world."

The visit coincided with the Jewish fast of the Seventeenth of Tammuz, commemorating the breach of Jerusalem's walls before the destruction of the Second Temple. It marks the beginning of the Three Weeks, the period of mourning leading to Tisha B'Av. Participants were respectfully reminded not to eat inside the synagogue, and the men were provided with kippah before entering.

Dr Peter Grant, a member of the synagogue's board, guided visitors around the magnificent building, which celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2024. He shared that when Liverpool's Jewish community commissioned their flagship synagogue, seven architectural firms submitted designs, six of them Jewish. The winning design, however, came from the Scottish Presbyterian Audsley brothers. Visitors admired the richly decorated interior, adorned with intricate geometric and floral patterns but notably free of human images, a feature immediately recognised by several Muslim participants. This provided an interesting contrast with St Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church, whose walls are filled with icons of Christ, the Holy Family, and saints.

Questions naturally followed about Jewish traditions, including the differences between Orthodox and Progressive Judaism, particularly concerning the role of women and practices surrounding ritual purity, such as immersion in the mikveh. The highlight came at the end of the tour, when Dr Grant drew back the heavy curtains to reveal the Ark containing the Torah scrolls, a breathtaking sight that drew audible admiration from the crowd.

The final stop was the Al Rahma Mosque. Here, women covered their heads and everyone removed their shoes before entering the prayer hall. Dr Badr Abdullah, Chairman of Liverpool Muslim Society (LMS), recounted how Liverpool's Muslim community began in 1953 when Al-Haj Ali Hizzam, a Yemeni sailor, opened a prayer room in his own home. Over the decades, that small beginning has grown into today's mosque, which has undergone several expansions and can now accommodate up to 3,000 worshippers.

The journey towards deeper interfaith understanding has not always been easy. Mustafa Abdul Yassir of LMS reflected: "There are people who want us to fear our differences rather than celebrate them. They want to convince us that there cannot be a church, a synagogue, and a mosque on the same street, let alone share the same vision of a peaceful community. But look around you today-this interfaith walk is our answer to that. When we open our doors to one another, fear evaporates. When we discover that mercy, charity, and love of neighbour are woven throughout the Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur'an, we realise just how much we truly share."

Rocio, a participant from Mexico, agreed, "We are all brothers and sisters as we are all sons of God. This walk was a reminder of the similarities rather than what could make us different. I had the honour to hear about other people's experiences of meeting God which reminded me of His Greatness and Highness."

The evening concluded with an impassioned reflection from the community chaplain, Abdulwase Sufian, "If the hearts are united, the people will be united!"

Perhaps the greatest sign of that unity came afterwards, as everyone gathered around a shared meal at the recently opened World Faith Café. Conversations continued long into the evening, proving once again that friendship often begins with simply walking together, and sharing a table.

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/55381>

#### **LINKS**

Faiths4Change <https://www.faiths4change.org.uk/>

Kuumba Imani Millennium Centre | Liverpool L8 Community Hub <https://kuumbaimani.org.uk/>

#### **THE WORK OF FREEDOM - A SERMON INSPIRED BY THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE FOR AMERICA'S 250TH ANNIVERSARY**

**Rev Lisa Degrenia** July 6, 2026

The World Cup is just the US having a giant sleepover with the cousins we never see because our parents hate each other. I admit, I have not watched a single game of the World Cup. (Can we still be friends?) But I've been brought to tears by the World Cup stories I see on my Instagram feed.

Some stories are silly. Visitors delighted by biscuits and gravy, chicken and waffles, and BBQ ribs. Confusion over free salsa and chips and free refills. Many are smuggling ranch dressing home in their luggage.

Then there are stories celebrating diverse cultures. People experiencing their first rodeo or baseball game. Dancing in the street, the Viking row, the Congo's living statue, and pride flags. Japanese fans cleaning stadiums after matches. The Tartan Army's bagpipe marches and drinking Boston dry. Glasgow and Boston are becoming sister cities. The prayer circles after the matches. The stories of extraordinary welcome and hospitality by the host cities.

On Facebook, Karim Fawzi Dakhia remarked,

"On behalf of Algerian supporters, we would like to express our deepest gratitude to all the people of Kansas City, and especially to the wonderful people of Lawrence, for your warm welcome, your incredible hospitality, and your kindness throughout the 2026 World Cup. Your support for our national football team and the respect and affection you showed to Algerian fans touched us deeply. These moments will stay in our hearts, and we will never forget them. You made us feel at home, far away from home. You will always be welcome in Algeria — your home away from home."

The Bosnia-Herzegovina team played a match in Inglewood, California, the historic home of the Crips and Bloods gangs. Crips wear blue. Bloods wear red. The Bosnians filled the streets with singing and chanting, wore their blue team colors, and set off blue smoke bombs. Instead of starting a riot, the Bosnians were treated to block parties, backyard barbecues, and a lowrider escort to the stadium.

Americans have gained a reputation for being rude, fake, arrogant, and deeply divided. We are seen as violent bullies who only want to rip people off. It's true, we can be those things. We have a long history of discrimination, segregation, imperialism, white supremacy, and predatory capitalism. Many wonder if America is doomed to a downward spiral of ugliness, inequality, and harm.

These stories remind us that we can be different. They give us a glimpse of true goodness, a glimpse of the Kingdom of God.

What if, at our core, at our truest selves, it's more about original blessing than original sin?

In Genesis 3, we see sin separates. Sin breaks. Sin takes a good gift of God and twists it into something it was never meant to be. Yet in Genesis 1, we see God naming each movement and part of creation blessed and good. At our core, at our truest original self, God names us good.

Blessing brings together. Blessing is gracious, thoughtful, and generous. Blessing continues to celebrate the beauty and diversity of the Garden, respecting and naming the different as beloved of God. By the grace of God, we can be a good people living in a good place, working together for the common good.

Many of us are already committed to embodying the fruit of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Many of us are committed to embodying the vision of the founders in the Declaration of Independence.

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.*

– The Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776

Are we living into this ideal fully? No, we have much, much work still to do. But we're seeing glimpses of it. We know it is possible. We trust the Kingdom is coming. It's breaking through.

The Declaration of Independence takes a strong stand against oppression. It was an extraordinary act of courage by the 56 who signed. Some suffered greatly for their choice. They were lawyers, merchants, physicians, farmers, ministers, and plantation owners. They represented 13 diverse colonies. They disagreed on many issues, but pledged "our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor" for the cause of freedom.

The Declaration of Independence speaks of freedom as a truth that is self-evident and a God-given right. A revolutionary idea in an age where every human was placed on a social ladder, from slave to king, a revolutionary idea in an age when only someone in power bestowed life, liberty, and happiness. The idea of a nation founded upon radical equality and dignity was a profound message to the world. It still is.

Will we, too, pledge "our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor" for the cause of freedom?

The founders understood that freedom is not the ability to have anything I want and to do anything I want with whoever I want, whenever I want, with no consequences. No, this twists freedom into something freedom was never meant to be – selfish and destructive. This false understanding of freedom blows up lives, families, businesses, and nations.

Freedom is not selfish. It is generous and servant-hearted.

• **Lisa Ann Moss Degrenia** <http://www.revlisad.com>

• This sermon was offered at Suntree United Methodist Church Melbourne, Florida on Sunday, July 5, 2026

<https://revlisad.com/2026/07/06/the-work-of-freedom-a-sermon-inspired-by-the-declaration-of-independence-for-americas-250th-anniversary/>

## LANCING THE BOIL: RACIAL INJUSTICE AND THE CALL TO TRUTH IN BELFAST

James Gordon Reid Haveloch-Jones 6 July 2026, *The Tablet*

**A racist incident in Belfast exposes a wound that cannot be met with indifference. Desmond Tutu's four-stage horizon of truth-telling can inspire a Catholic response to racial injustice.**

On 4 July, a man in South Belfast was subjected to racial abuse inside a restaurant on University Street. The incident was distressing, but it was not isolated. It exposed a deeper wound in the Irish body politic. A wound that distorts our common life and diminishes the image of God in those who endure it. Racism is not a peripheral issue in Ireland; it is a structural reality shaping the daily experience of many Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities.

Christians cannot respond to this simply with blunt secular tools. We are called to a deeper work: the prophetic work of truth-telling, listening, repentance and reconciliation. Archbishop Desmond Tutu captured this with unflinching clarity when he reflected on the healing of social wounds: "The wound that was festering has to be opened up. It might be painful, but it is better to lance the boil, and cleanse it, and pour the balm." His words offer a four-stage horizon for Christian engagement with racial injustice.

### 1. Naming the festering wound

Tutu begins with the wound itself not the pain of opening it, but the reality of its festering. This is where any Christian response must begin: with the honest naming of racism as a wound in the body politic of Ireland. The Belfast incident was not an isolated eruption of hostility; it was a manifestation of deeper structural patterns that diminish the dignity of those made in the image of God. Naming the wound requires the humility to listen to lived experiences honestly without defensiveness. Meaning, acknowledging racism is not simply interpersonal, however embedded in systems and assumptions that have gone unchallenged for far too long.

### 2. Opening the wound

Tutu's second movement is the most uncomfortable: the wound must be opened. This is not a cruel act simply a medium of truth telling. The Gospel reading for Friday 3 July reflects the encounter between the risen Christ and Thomas, offering a parallel. Thomas needed to see the wounds before he could believe they were real. In the same way, societies must confront the reality of racism before they can be transformed. We cannot heal what we refuse to see and truly believe.

Opening the wound requires listening with reverence to the lived experience of our BAME sisters and brothers. It means creating spaces where their stories can be spoken without guilt or shame. It also demands that those who have benefited from existing structures acknowledge their part in sustaining them.

### 3. Lancing the boil

The third movement, lancing the boil, is the moment of confrontation. Tutu understood that truth-telling is painful. When he chaired South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, he insisted that honest encounter between victim and perpetrator was essential for healing. He believed that even the perpetrator of grave injustice could be transformed through truth. This conviction was rooted in his understanding of grace: that no person is beyond redemption and no community beyond repair.

Northern Ireland has never fully applied this principle to racism. We have developed sophisticated ways of speaking about sectarianism, identity and constitutional futures, but far fewer ways of confronting racial injustice. Lancing the boil means naming prejudice, acknowledging structural inequality and refusing to treat each incident as exceptional. It is the moment when truth is spoken plainly, without euphemism or avoidance.

### 4. Cleansing and pouring the balm

The final movement, cleansing and pouring the balm, is the work of healing. The Ignatian tradition offers a method for this work. Long before modern psychotherapy, Ignatius taught the discipline of radical honesty: the willingness to face what is uncomfortable within ourselves, trusting that grace meets us tenderly in the agony of truth. In the context of racial justice, this means confronting prejudice and inherited assumptions with the hope of transformation.

Cleansing the wound involves repentance, learning and structural change. Pouring the balm involves solidarity, accompaniment and the building of communities where dignity is upheld. In early July, delegates from the Anglican Consultative Council walked together across the Peace Bridge in Derry – Catholics and Protestants, BAME and white – embodying St Paul's vision that "there is no longer Jew or Greek... for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Such gestures remind us that unity is a lived reality made possible by grace.

In my book *The Gold Standard: Coaching for Excellence*, I recall a moment when history and humanity converged. When for me, as an individual, the personal became prophetic. It came through a handwritten letter from Archbishop Desmond Tutu, then Professor of Post-Conflict Studies at King's College London. In our handwritten correspondence, he shared a vision that has never left me: love can overcome hate.

Tutu's conviction was rooted in Ubuntu: "I am because we are".

This inverts the perverse secular mantra of Descartes, "I think therefore I am". It acknowledges the profound truth that "God thinks, therefore we are". It is through his sustaining and cherishing of us as individuals and communities we find dignity and worth. Dehumanising one sister or brother, dehumanises all and by extension God. It is a theology of reconciliation forged in the fires of apartheid and tempered by grace. For Tutu, mentoring was an act of restoration: a way of rehumanising one another across divides of race, class and culture. His insight remains a compass for any community seeking healing.

Healing rarely comes easily. As Love Maria Willis wrote, we do not pray for ease, but "for strength that we may ever live our lives courageously." Racial justice requires precisely this courage: the courage to listen, to repent and to walk together towards the horizon of reconciliation.

The wound is open. Christ calls us to touch... and to heal!

<https://www.thetablet.co.uk/blogs/lancing-the-boil-racial-injustice-and-the-call-to-truth-in-belfast/>

• *James Gordon Reid Haveloch-Jones is an educational consultant, applied theologian, and author of an Amazon Top 50 Study Skills bestseller. He is an Honorary Associate Fellow of St George's House, Windsor Castle, and a trustee of the Heythrop Association at the University of London. He is a Contracted Contributing Writer for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales "God Who Speaks" initiative. He is also a guest writer for: Church Times, National Catholic Reporter and Premier Christianity.*

## **THE TROUBLES: UNHIDING THE TRUTH**

**Ian Linden** July 4, 2026

In Belfast in the mid-1980s I watched a fully armed British soldier, shouldering a rifle, inspecting a coach for weapons. The coach was full of primary school children waiting to go to the Servite priory in Benburb for a weekend retreat away from home, a poor and rough part of the city. At mass, there was a prayer in thanksgiving for 'new shoes' and, somewhat competitively, for deceased grannies, first one who had died 'a year ago', followed by one who had died 'a month ago' and finally a granny who had shuffled off this mortal coil 'a day ago'. The celebrant wisely wound up the bidding prayers. It was sweet and funny but, of course, apart from the first prayed for granny, many people actually were dying violently in the Troubles.

A month or so ago I went back to give a lecture in Queen's College. The Good Friday Agreement had come and felt long gone. It was sad to see, after the great achievement ending sectarian killing and the creation of a new political dispensation, how little had changed. Miles of walls separating working class unionist and nationalist communities, Catholic from Protestant, with gates shut early in the evening to separate them. Only 10% of schools integrated. Everything still fed into the sacred binary. I was lecturing about Gaza, Palestine and Israel. The Catholic students supported the Palestinians. The Protestants far less.

There are so many deaths still left uninvestigated. So many families with no real idea what happened to their loved ones. Their seeking answers after all this time, in a divided society with pockets of worrying residual thuggery, is an act both of courage and proof of how important is 'closure' for moving beyond grief.

Investigative journalism, finding out what others want to hide, is more dangerous: a great way to make powerful and/or dangerous enemies and for lawyers to guarantee investigations will need big budgets. Even without punishing legal proceedings, the work takes time and time costs money. With an impressive portfolio of articles, books and TV productions dating back to the 1970s, John Ware is a notable survivor of a rare breed of journalist.

*Ware's Neither Confirm Nor Deny: British Intelligence, Lawless Agent Running and the Suppression of Truth*, Merrion Press 2026, was published a few weeks ago. It exposes and sifts the dirt in the dirty war known in Ireland as The Troubles. It is a gift of truth for the many families of innocent victims whose deaths have been left uninvestigated, allegedly for national security reasons.

'Neither Confirm Nor Deny' is the refrain dear to the British Intelligence Services, used repeatedly by the Royal Ulster Constabulary, RUC, MI5 and the FRU, the Army's Force Research [agent running] Unit, and then by the British government.

It served to hide the crimes of the extraordinary number of covert agents who had penetrated rival loyalist and nationalist organisations and their armed wings notably the Irish Republican Army (IRA), Ulster Defense Association (UDA) and Freedom Fighters (UFF). To survive and to harvest the hoped-for, high quality, intelligence highly placed agents were complicit in extreme violence. Ware struggles with this moral dilemma throughout the book.

The story focuses on the actions of two figures, Brian Nelson and Freddie Scappaticci (known as Stakeknife) and their handlers, chronicling how they engaged or colluded in abductions, torture and killings of IRA targets. Nelson was embedded in the UDA. Scappaticci worked his way up to a critical senior position in the IRA's Internal Security Unit (ISU), and was in charge of compiling their assassination lists, participating in the commission of murders. Stakeknife was too often in the habit of being in proximity to killings or abductions to absolve him from responsibility for them. He led a charmed, reckless life. Even his wife did not know he was working for the British.

Evidence, meticulously compiled by Ware from FRU contact forms (CFs), recording meetings with the two agents, indicates that even when Nelson and Scappaticci warned in good time of a planned assassination, no action appears to have been taken to protect the targets.

Ware's account suggests that senior officers in the different intelligence agencies valued their agents and potential intelligence 'take' more than the lives of potential and actual targets, however slim the evidence that they were active IRA members. To name an agent was in all senses beyond the pale. That their actions should not be totally outside the remit of criminal justice apparently less so. Britain is not, of course, the only State responding to what is declared a national security threat to have condoned assassinations.

It was in September 1989, in response to great pressure and very late in the day, that Nelson and Scappaticci became enough of a concern for the Chief Constable of the RUC, Hugh Annesley (later Sir Hugh), to initiate an independent investigation. In an attempt to show the UDA exclusively assassinated IRA gunmen, the UDA had been leaking documents demonstrating collusion between loyalist paramilitaries and the security forces. Chief Constable Annesley asked John Stevens (later Sir), a future Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, then deputy chief constable of Cambridgeshire, to undertake the investigation. Laurie Sherwood, a CID inspector, Stevens' special senior assistant, were the only heroes in this ugly saga. They faced intractable systemic obstruction from the different intelligence services including the withholding of key documents and information as the highest authorities in the different agencies clung to what they hoped was 'plausible deniability'.

The principal front-line handlers who failed to stop the killings and their agents who were complicit in them were working for a British army military intelligence unit. For some time, even the existence of this unit was kept from Stevens. From the Military's point of view, this was war. Most of the dead named in the cases against Nelson and Stakeknife were the enemy, active members of the IRA. Around the world in warfare, the consequence of treachery is often death.

But several of those killed both by the IRA and UDA/UDF, with assistance from British agents, were innocent Catholics and not, as alleged, informers. The irony is that Prime Minister Thatcher always insisted The Troubles weren't a war between the IRA and Britain. So, the IRA were not belligerents. They were criminals and it followed they should be treated as criminals. This included not being given special treatment even if this meant making martyrs out of the hunger strikers.

The Irish Bishops remained steadfastly opposed to armed struggle as a way of solving unjust social conditions, Northern Ireland's problem of clashing identities, and were supported by Pope John Paul II in a passionate promotion of human rights and rejection of violence in an historic sermon in Drogheda during his October 1979 visit. "What Christianity does forbid is to seek solutions to these situations by the ways of hatred, by the murdering of defenceless people, by the methods of terrorism", he said. His appeal to "the moral sense and Christian conviction of Irish men and women".... "that nobody may ever call murder by any other name than murder" was anathema to both warring sides in the Troubles and those who spied on them.

<https://www.ianlinden.com/latest-blogs/the-troubles-unhiding-the-truth>

• *Professor Ian Linden is Visiting Professor at St Mary's University, Strawberry Hill, London. A past director of the Catholic Institute for International Relations, he was awarded a CMG for his work for human rights in 2000. He has also been an adviser on Europe and Justice and Peace issues to the Department of International Affairs of the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales. Ian chairs a new charity for After-school schooling in Beirut for Syrian refugees and Lebanese kids in danger of dropping out partnering with CARITAS Lebanon and work on board of Las Casas Institute in Oxford with Richard Finn OP. His latest book was Global Catholicism published by Hurst in 2009.*

## **WHY THE CHURCH MUST SPEAK: A PERSONAL REFLECTION ON FAITH, POVERTY & JUSTICE**

**Gavin Aitchison of Church Action on Poverty writes:** Deborah moved to the UK 25 years ago, fleeing civil war. Her family arrived in Glasgow and very quickly encountered kindness and generosity of spirit from total strangers. Her father then went on to start a new church in the city, which went from strength to strength. Deborah has now shared a very personal reflection on faith, poverty and social justice, drawing on her experience of the asylum system, disability, poverty and also the wonderful goodness of the church. She urges churches to speak up on social issues, and identifies six practical ways they can do so. Deborah says: “My family’s story is evidence of what the Church can do - and I believe wholeheartedly that churches across the UK can do so again.”

**In this guest blog for Church Action on Poverty, Deborah Vithyanandan draws on her own experiences of injustice and marginalisation, and urges the church across the UK to stand up for justice:**

I arrived in Scotland as a child in 2001, seeking asylum with my family after escaping a conflict that had devastated our country. We left behind our home, our community and our sense of security, carrying only our faith and a fragile hope for safety. As Sri Lankan Tamils, we fled a civil war that ravaged our homeland for nearly three decades and claimed an estimated 100,000 lives.

One of my earliest memories of Scotland is from when we lived in the Maryhill area. It was winter, and my dad slipped on black ice and fell badly. We were new to the country, we didn’t know anyone, and everything felt unfamiliar. But the local Scottish church stepped in immediately. People who had never met us before came to help, support my dad and make sure our family was safe. They didn’t know us — but God knew. Their kindness was a lifeline in a moment of fear, and my dad never forgot it. Looking back, I can see that this simple act of compassion was one of the first signs of God placing the right people around us.

Around this time, the Tamil community in Glasgow began to grow. My dad felt a strong calling from God to serve that community — to build a church where Tamil families, refugees and new arrivals could find faith, belonging and hope. What began with a moment of kindness in Maryhill became the start of a whole new chapter for our family and many others.

What followed were nine long years within the UK asylum system — years marked by uncertainty, restricted agency and prolonged waiting. Today, more than 128,000 people in the UK remain in that same state of limbo, awaiting an initial decision on their asylum claim.

We were prohibited from working and were issued vouchers instead of money — a system that felt dehumanising and socially isolating. Although the voucher system has changed today, many people seeking asylum still face long waits, limited rights and significant barriers to dignity and independence. Even in that difficult period, I witnessed God’s sustaining presence: guiding, protecting and providing for my family in ways we could not have anticipated.

### **The transformative power of education**

Education has been one of the most significant instruments of transformation in my life. After completing my secondary education at a special needs school, I gradually built my confidence and skills. I progressed from college to college, taking every opportunity available to me. I completed an HND in Digital Art, followed by a BA (Hons) in New Media Arts, and eventually a Master’s degree in Disability Studies. Each step was a testimony to God’s grace and to the teachers, mentors and communities who believed in my potential.

Although I arrived in Scotland with no material resources, education became the means through which God opened opportunities that structural barriers sought to deny. It equipped me with language, analytical skills and the confidence to understand the systems that marginalise individuals — and the capacity to challenge them. My journey from asylum seeker to graduate is a testament to God’s provision.

### **A grandmother’s prayer**

Long before we fled Sri Lanka, my late grandmother prayed faithfully that her son would grow into a God-fearing man. She could not have foreseen the hardships he would endure: the loss of two brothers to war, the necessity of fleeing his homeland, or the challenges of rebuilding life in a foreign country. Yet God knew — and God honoured her prayer. When we visited Sri Lanka in 2015, my father had the privilege of baptising her, a moment that brought deep joy to our family. She passed away the following year, in 2016, but her faith continues to shape my journey and the life of our family even now.

## Advocating for disabled and migrant communities

Today, I advocate for disabled people and for individuals with lived experience of immigration and asylum. As someone living with Cerebral Palsy, I understand what it means to navigate environments not designed with your needs in mind. Across the UK, disabled people face a 29% employment gap, meaning they are almost twice as likely to be unemployed as non-disabled people. These experiences have shaped my commitment to justice.

The Church has a vital role to play in this work. Disabled people, refugees and asylum seekers are bearers of God's image, possessing gifts and insights that enrich our communities. When churches exclude them — whether through inaccessible buildings, unfamiliar cultural practices or leadership that does not reflect their experiences — the entire body of Christ is diminished.

### From one church to many

The Tamil church my father helped establish in Glasgow — born out of hardship, sustained by prayer and motivated by a desire to share the gospel — has multiplied. Today, numerous Tamil churches exist across Scotland. Lives have been transformed, communities strengthened and individuals who arrived with nothing have found faith, fellowship and belonging.

Churches can contribute to justice in practical ways:

- Promote access to education.
- Listen attentively to disabled people, refugees and asylum seekers.
- Ensure genuine accessibility in buildings, culture and leadership.
- Engage publicly through advocacy and community involvement.
- Collaborate with organisations already engaged in justice work.
- Pray intentionally for those experiencing poverty, disability and migration.

### A word of hope

My grandmother's prayer for her son has borne fruit in ways she could never have imagined.

Today, by God's grace, I hold two degrees and advocate nationally for disabled people and for those with experience of immigration and asylum. This is not because the system made it easy, but because God is faithful — and because people along the way believed in the power of education, inclusion and justice.

The Just Church programme is an invitation to participate in that same kind of faithful, hope-filled action. My family's story is evidence of what the Church can do. And I believe wholeheartedly that churches across the United Kingdom can do so again.

**About the author:** *Deborah is a Sri Lankan Tamil Christian, disability advocate and mixed media artist based in Glasgow. After beginning her education in a special needs school, she went on to earn an HND in Digital Art and Culture, a BA (Hons) in New Media Art, and a Master's degree in Disability Studies. She now works to advance justice for disabled and migrant communities.*

<https://church-poverty.org.uk/2026/06/08/why-the-church-must-speak-up-deborah-vithiyandandan/>

## UK GOVERNMENT RECOMMENDS RE IS INCLUDED IN NATIONAL CURRICULUM

July 3, 2026: The Government has announced that it is pursuing plans for Religious Education to form part of the new national curriculum, after a consensus was achieved with faith groups about programmes of study.

<https://natre.org.uk/news/a-step-forward-for-re-government-includes-subject-in-september-curriculum-consultation/>

At present, RE is outside the national curriculum, with decisions over content taken locally, leading to wide variations. Last year, a curriculum review called for RE to be included in the national curriculum, but said the sector had to "reach consensus on whether this is achievable".

The RE Task and Finish Group, led by Vanessa Ogden, a former academy CEO turned senior civil servant, was set up to propose programmes of study and national standards for children from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 4. All schools will retain their freedom to build on the requirements of the new national curriculum. and the change will be introduced in stages.

Key leaders engaged in the process have welcomed the “unprecedented” consensus reached, saying the decision will put RE on an equal footing with other subjects and end the “postcode lottery” of provision.

The Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson said: “With so much focus on what divides us – and race and religion so often at the heart of that division – equipping young people with the knowledge, understanding and values that religious education teaches could hardly be more important.”

**Read more here:** <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/re-will-form-part-of-national-curriculum-after-consensus-reached/>

**National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE) report gives reaction here:**

<https://natre.org.uk/news/a-step-forward-for-re-government-includes-subject-in-september-curriculum-consultation/>

**RE Council reaction here:**

<https://religionseducationcouncil.org.uk/2025/11/new-era-for-religious-education-as-panel-recommends-subject-added-to-national-curriculum-for-the-first-time/>

## **DIVERSE COALITION URGES PM TO RETHINK MILITARY SPENDING**

**Cato Peddar July 2, 2026 Source: Quakers in Britain**

More than fifty humanitarian, climate and peacebuilding organisations are urging Keir Starmer to rethink Britain's growing military spending, ahead of the NATO summit in Ankara.

The joint letter, organised by Quakers in Britain and Rethinking Security, follows this week's Defence Investment Plan (DIP), which promised a further £15 billion for the military.

Signatories including CAFOD, Pax Christi Scotland, Christian CND, Green New Deal Rising and the Iona Community warn against skewing funding away from other forms of international engagement.

The shift represents a "staggering shift" of resources from productive to destructive ends, at a time of armed conflict, inequality and climate breakdown.

Development, diplomacy, peacebuilding, and conflict and atrocity prevention are all essential and underfunded tools in building a safer world, they say.

Signatories say:

- The UK's military spending is on track to reach its highest level since the Second World War.
- The ratio of military to development spending will soon reach almost nine-to-one, up from below four-to-one six years ago.
- The UK's nuclear weapons programme now exceeds Russia's spending and is the third most expensive in the world.
- They warn the Prime Minister will face pressure in Ankara to further entrench the UK in a "war-orientated economy."

He should instead strengthen the UK's role in peacebuilding, climate cooperation and international justice, they write.

Hannah Brock Womack of Quakers in Britain said the DIP took money from every government department, while "we're told there's not enough money for decent social care. These are political choices. They are not inevitable and they are not uncontroversial," she said. As Quakers we are driven by our faith, and in this letter, we join a diverse range of organisations also saying: stop, think again, this is the wrong path."

Ruth Harvey, leader of the Iona Community, said peace was "an active process of making things whole and restoring what is broken. We've signed this letter as part of our commitment to reconciliation and disarmament," she said. "These are the tools which help us follow Jesus' example of nonviolent action, which we are still called to today."

A copy of the letter will be sent to Andy Burnham MP, Keir Starmer's likely successor.

**Read full letter here:** [www.quaker.org.uk/documents/pm-letter-natosummit-2-july-2026](http://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/pm-letter-natosummit-2-july-2026)  
<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/55352>

## DIARY


### AUGUST

**6 Hiroshima Day and 9 Nagasaki Day** Merseyside CND and Merseyside Pax Christi will be holding events to commemorate victims of the atomic weapons dropped on these days in 1945. A vigil liturgy planned for 9 August in Liverpool, no definite venue yet - please look on the Merseyside Pax Christi FaceBook page nearer the time: <https://www.facebook.com/Merseyside.CND/> and <https://paxchristi.org.uk/>.

SEE poster below for Chester event

**HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI FLOWER MEMORIAL**  
To remember all those who died and suffered  
as a result of the atomic bombs dropped in 1945,  
and in the firm belief that it must never happen again

Thursday 6th August 2026  
at 8.00 pm  
The Groves, Chester



All are welcome to meet at the bandstand for readings, music, a period of silent reflection  
and the dropping of flowers on the river. Please bring white flowers if you wish.

Organised by Chester Peace Groups

### SEPTEMBER – DECEMBER

**Merseyside Pax Christi meetings as follows: 8 Sept, 10 Oct, 12 Nov and 10 Dec**

All meetings 2-4 pm at Quaker Meeting House, School Lane, Liverpool. L1 3BT New members welcome.  
Contact Jan Harper 07591082195 [janharper20211@outlook.com](mailto:janharper20211@outlook.com)

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- **Read the SUMMER issue of MOUTHPEACE the quarterly online newsletter for Shrewsbury, Liverpool and Lancaster dioceses:** <https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/njpn-north-west/summer-mouthpeace-2026/>
- See also the daily e-bulletin Independent Catholic News [www.indcatholicnews.com](http://www.indcatholicnews.com)

*The views expressed in this bulletin are not necessarily those of NJPN*